

2021 effective entry guide



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This document was created to help entrants submit an effective entry. On the following pages, you will find tips from the judges on each of the four scoring sections and overall storytelling techniques.

The insights presented comes directly from the jury. These statements do not represent the opinions of The Effie® Awards organisation, board of directors, steering committee, or staff – all comments and data presented – except for the specified Effie advice – are straight from the industry executives who dedicated their time to serve on an Effie Jury.

We hope you find the information useful as you prepare your cases for the upcoming competition.

JUDGING PROCESS

Effie entries are judged by some of the brightest and most experienced business leaders. Entries are judged in two phases. Round One judges evaluate entries on a stand-alone basis, without comparison to other entries in their category. Each judge reviews a unique set of entries across many categories. During Final Round judging, finalists in each category are judged against other finalists in the same category and judges discuss each case. In both rounds, all elements of an entry – written case and creative examples – are judged.

Judges are not allowed to review submissions from the category they work in – for example, an automotive judge would not score submissions in the Automotive category. For this reason, **it is crucial to provide category context and limit the use of industry jargon** in your entry.

Additionally, judges are reviewing between 15-18 entries in a full day session. Because of the volume of entries, **clear, concise and honest entries stand out**.

SCORING

Judges are asked to evaluate specific criteria in scoring a case's overall effectiveness and provide four separate scores analyzing specific attributes of the work. The breakdown is as follows:

Challenge, Context & Objectives	23.3%
Insights & Strategic Idea	23.3%
Bringing the Idea to Life	23.3%
Results	30%

The judges' scores determine which entries are awarded a gold, silver or bronze Effie trophy. Each winning level – gold, silver, bronze – has a minimum score required in order for a finalist to be eligible for an award. It is possible that a category may produce one, two, three or four winners of any level or perhaps no winners at all.

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TOP TEN ENTRY TIPS

1. “Start with the executive summary before you try to write individual sections. Get your overall story really strong, crisp, clear, and inspiring.”
2. “Be sure to **provide context**; most judges don’t know your category or what success looks like.”
3. “Don’t underestimate the power of a **concise, well-written story**. It is not only refreshing -- it encourages high marks. Less is more!”
4. “The entrants who build their cases from a place of **honesty, authenticity, and simplicity** vs. marketing jargon were really the strongest.
5. “**Craft a real insight**. One that is true to the audience and brand - not just an observation, data point or an expected statement about the target audience.”
6. “Remember that communications strategies include both creative and media strategies - not just tactics.”
7. “Make sure your creative reel doesn’t just reiterate what you said in your entry. Use it to complement that information.”
8. “Be transparent with the results, and how they clearly connect to the objectives. Don’t try to fake it and write objectives to meet existing results. We can tell and will ding you for it.”
9. “Have people outside of your industry review your submission. It should be clear to anyone, regardless of their industry expertise.”
10. “Check for grammar, typos, math errors, and inconsistencies.”

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SCORING SECTION 1: CHALLENGE, CONTEXT & OBJECTIVES

Questions 1A-1C

This scoring section is the glue that shapes the other elements of the case. Judges often say that if this section is weak, the entire entry weakens because the context is needed to understand “how big the idea was” and “how profound the results were.” The challenge and business situation your brand was facing should be clearly understood. Elements are assessed for both suitability and ambitiousness within the framework of the Strategic Communications Challenge.

How did each area relate to the stated objectives and were the objectives fully explained? Entrants should detail **what objectives they had and why they are significant in the context of their situation**. If the entrant did not have objectives upfront or they were open-objectives, they should explain this. Judges consistently state that they can tell when objectives have been retrofitted and down score entries because of this.

- Provide context about the category, marketplace, company, competitive environment, and the degree of difficulty of this challenge. **Lack of context is one of the most common judge complaints.**
- Who is the audience you are trying to reach? Describe their attitudes, behaviors, culture, etc. Why are they your target?
- Explain why your objectives are significant for your brand. Provide prior year benchmarks when available. Detail the business problem the effort was meant to address. Why was this a challenging situation?
- Note the tools you planned to use to measure each objective.

To understand how judges score the Challenge, Context & Objectives, part of last year’s judging instructions are provided below.

How do I judge the Challenge, Context & Objectives?

Entrants should detail what objectives they had & why they are significant in the context of their situation.

The definition of the Challenge is the glue that shapes the other elements of the case. Please ensure that the Challenge is clearly understood, both as described in the case and from any other knowledge you may have of the particular category. Assess the remaining elements of the case for both suitability and ambitiousness within the framework of the Challenge.

Weight should be given both to the degree of difficulty and to whether the entrant has provided enough context to evaluate the case’s effectiveness in this section.

- Entrants are advised to provide judges with an understanding of the category, competitive and other context as well as to outline the goals they had for the case or to indicate why they may not have had upfront goals but why what they have achieved is significant. If context regarding the category situation is missing and/or understanding of why the goals (or results achieved) were challenging this would be a reason to score lower.

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JUDGE ADVICE: CHALLENGE, CONTEXT & OBJECTIVES

- “The best cases clearly articulated the challenge for the brand, the category and competitive landscape, and what the overall goals were. They also had KPIs that aligned well to that challenge that were clearly not retro-fitted to the resulting outcome.”
- “Make it clearer if these are challenging or typical objectives. Every marketing goal is to grow share/sales but **what makes it particularly challenging?** Also, be clearer on expectations and how you set those benchmarks so it doesn't look like you sandbagged results.”
- “Telling me what your objectives were, and more importantly telling me **why** those objectives matter is the difference between passing through Round One and not.”
- “Those that communicated their target audience clearly made it easier to put the case into context and made it much more compelling in understanding how they brought the idea to life.”
- “You shouldn't have 10+ objectives just because you have 10+ data points you want to share in the results section. It's clear when cases are trying to share every positive number they have, rather than focusing on what's most important to the campaign goals.”
- “**Framing the category** appropriately is critical, as some judges may be unfamiliar with the specific nuances of the category.”
- “Really focus in on ensuring you have the correct challenge and objectives identified and clearly state how you will measure those. It's OK if you don't have a quantitative way to measure, but be clear about what that will be -- don't try to show a quantitative measurement IF you truly don't have one that meets up to the stated objectives.”
- “Connect results to objectives very clearly. **Don't try to fake it and write objectives to meet existing results.** We can tell and will ding you for it.”

“If the Challenge section was weak, it weakened the entire entry because the context wasn't there to understand how big the idea was, or how profound the results were.”

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SCORING SECTION 2: INSIGHTS & STRATEGIC IDEA

Questions 2A-2B

Judges evaluate how inventive and effective the Idea and Strategy are in meeting communications challenge and how closely the Idea, Strategy and Results address the Challenge.

- Share your insight in one sentence. Explain how it originated. What research was done that resulted in the insight or awareness of the opportunity or revised/validated it after the fact?
- Explain how the big idea addressed the challenge.
- Remember to state your answer to **question 2B in one sentence**. This is not your tag line – it is the core idea that drove your effort and led to your results.

JUDGE ADVICE: INSIGHTS

- “Describe fully the “ah-ha” consumer insight that made your idea unique and effective.”
- “Write stronger insights - why should your brand own a truth is very different than simply identifying a truth exists.”
- “Clearly explain how you arrived at your insight and why it's relevant to your marketing challenge.”
- “Insights need to feel **new and different**, with a sense of **tension and actionability**. The idea needs to take the insight and activate it in an interesting, compelling and useful way. And, most importantly, in a way that helps achieve your stated objectives.”
- “Did the entrant know the audience? Was the insight consistent with the audience’s beliefs and did it actually drive an insightful notion from which a strategy could be developed? And did the work reflect the audience, insight, and strategy consistently?”
- “Really bring your insight to life. How did you find it? Why is it an insight and not just a piece of information about your target or your challenge? How does that insight relate to what else is happening in the category, or what is happening with the consumer? **How is your brand uniquely positioned to take advantage of that insight?**”
- “The consumer insights really need to be particular to the brand not simply generic for the whole demographic.”
- “Use the insight as the golden thread and let me clearly see how it informs the creative and the results.”

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JUDGE ADVICE: STRATEGIC IDEA

- “Dig deeper into their consumers and draw links to their brand. A great idea is meaningless if it doesn't reflect on the brand.”
- “The **idea** is the pivot which turns the smart analysis of the problem into a **unique solution** that none of our competitors could emulate. Too many idea statements were generic and displayed no deep consumer understanding.”
- “The idea needs to tie directly back to the consumer insight and not be the tactical execution that was deployed. The idea needs to be **crisp**, but also tell the judge enough detail so that it is **easy to understand** how the team arrived at this idea and why it is **meaningful** to the brand and campaign.”
- “The idea is **not** a recitation of the tagline!”

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SCORING SECTION 3: BRINGING THE IDEA TO LIFE

Question 3 + Media Addendum + Creative Reel

Judges are looking to see why you chose specific media channels – how do they relate to your strategy and audience? Is the creative work effective? Does it address your objectives? Entrants should articulate their **media and creative strategy**.

- Tie your insights and strategic challenge into your communications strategy.
- Did your communications change over time? Explain how.
- Explain why you selected the media channels – why were these right for your audience and idea? Why didn't you choose others?

Charts outlining communications touch points, owned/earned/paid media, sponsorships, etc. are all answered in the online Entry Portal via the Media Addendum.

“Explain the media strategy. Entrants mentioned TV and print ads but didn't always mention where they ran and how they appealed to the target.”

Paid Media Expenditures (Media Addendum)

Paid media expenditures (purchased and donated), not including agency fees or production costs, for the effort described in this entry. Given the 'spirit' of this question use your judgment on what constitutes fees, production and the broad span that covers media – from donated space to activation costs.

- **Traditional and non-traditional paid media.** Example: purchase of a TV spot or purchase of a mobile ad.
- **Out-of-Pocket activation costs.** Example: For something like an event, what did it cost to have the pop-up store? What did it cost to buy the key search terms on Google?
- **Value of donated media.** Example: If you are a film festival, did a sponsor give you 2 hours' worth of free TV ad time? Estimate what it would have cost you if you had paid for it.

Owned Media and Sponsorship (Media Addendum)

- **Any owned media.** Examples: company owned real-estate, either physical or digital, that acted as communication channels for case content (e.g. corporate website/social media platforms, packaging, branded store, fleet of buses, etc.)
 - If you select owned media checkpoints in the Communications Touchpoints chart, be sure to explain your use of these channels in the Owned Media question.
- **Any sponsorships that provided communications benefits.** Example: As part of a sponsorship of the tennis finals, I received free ad space for my logo during primetime.

The creative reel is your place to show examples of your work – not to repeat what you outlined in the written case. Judges review the written case before watching the creative reel, so it is important these elements are created with each other in mind.

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JUDGE ADVICE: BRINGING THE IDEA TO LIFE

- “Tie the **communication strategy directly back to objectives and insights**. Without that it's just a media plan, not a communications strategy.”
- “Clearly depict how the campaign was executed in market. Was there a "path" you wanted consumers to go on and what was it?”
- “Remember that communications strategies include both creative and media strategies - **not just tactics**.”
- “If you are using a media channel, how are you using it - what targeting is being leveraged, and why is your use of this media more effective than any other agency or brand?”
- “With so many **channels** available to marketers now, part of the challenge is conveying how you achieved reach across them. **How and why did you place importance on some over others?**”
- “Integrate the media strategy and show how it links to the full execution as well as, potentially, how it evolved with the campaign. Show how you were able to "test and learn" if digital was a key component.”
- “**Too many people focused only on the creative execution**. Talk about how you reached your audience in effective ways in the same breadth and depth that you talk about the creative idea.”

JUDGE ADVICE: CREATIVE REEL

- “Be sure the written case and video **complement each other** and **do not repeat** each other. It isn't about the quality of the video itself but more about the content.”
- “In many cases the creative failed to live up to the story. In others, the video totally obscured the ability to view creative. It became a rehash of the story/case and a lot of salesmanship vs. a true showcase of the work.”
- “**Don't turn the reel into a pitch** -- it reduces credibility.”
- “Keep the storytelling and results out of the creative reel, and highlight the creative, especially the different executions. **The more different types of creative shown, the better**. I took the judging seriously and read through the pdf carefully, so there was no need to duplicate the story - what I was missing was how everything was brought to life.”
- “The creative reel should showcase all of the work that I've just read about and want to see. **I'd rather clearly see the different executions over hearing setup.**”

“Don't completely repeat the case in video form. Use the video to bring to life the key elements of the campaign. We've read the written case.”

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SCORING SECTION 4: RESULTS

Questions 4A-4B

Judges are looking for **direct correlations between objectives and results**. For example, if the objective is to improve brand awareness, the proof cannot be an increase in sales. If you achieved additional results, explain what they were and why they are significant. If you did not achieve a particular objective, explain this. Make a compelling argument **why the communications led to the results achieved** rather than a different factor and make a compelling argument regarding why the results you achieved are significant.

“Results are critical. Show how your results tie back to the challenge and objectives, and focus on how the big idea drove these results specifically.”

Entries range from small cases in regional markets to nationwide blitzes. Judges take into account the environment in which each case exists. It is important to **include category context**, as judges may not be knowledgeable of the nuances of your particular category. For example, a small percentage move in a highly-segmented, high volume category is more difficult to achieve than a large percentage change in a small, less-competitive or non-competitive category. Likewise, a large sales increase for a product that has never advertised before might be less impressive than a smaller sales increase for a product that has no budget increase but changed its marketing communications strategy.

KEY REMINDERS

- **Restate objectives/KPIs** so judges can easily reference objectives against your results.
- Provide **context** with historical data, industry benchmarks, competitors, etc.
- Explain why the results you are presenting are important. How did the results tie together and **impact the brand and business?**
- Explain how you know it was your marketing efforts that led to the results.
- Eliminate or address other factors in the marketplace that could have contributed to your success. Judges value honesty – they are senior members of the industry and will downscore where information is withheld.

DATA

- For confidential information, proof of performance may be indexed or provided as percentages.
- **Charts and graphs** are useful tools to present your data clearly.
- Including results after 31 March 2021 will result in disqualification.
- If you cannot provide certain business results, explain why you cannot or why they are less important. Think through creative and meaningful ways to present the significance of the results you cannot share. For example, the results achieved were the equivalent of opening a new 200,000 sq. meters store in that market. When key metrics are withheld without explanation, judges typically imagine it is because the results were weak.
- **Entrants must source all data** (source, type of research, dates). **Do not include any agency names in sources.** See the sourcing section of the entry kit for full details.

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JUDGE ADVICE: RESULTS

- “There was a significant amount of obvious hyperbole and loose connection to strategic goals. Entrants should focus on using the results to tie up their story in a neat bow.”
- “Too many entries failed to **quantify the true impact of their work**. Many could benefit from more extensive measurement before, during and after campaigns to show the net change in perceptions or behaviors. Too many squishy KPIs.”
- “Clearly demonstrate the business results. The more context the better.”
- “Some results were just sloppy and did not align with the objectives established up front. If you set a sales goal, give some context as to why that goal is relevant; **don't just report a metric without context.**”
- “It's all about the results, right? I felt that many cases could show that the work was somehow linked to a movement in sales, but they were weak in **being clear about specifically how the work was effective** in driving sales and/or what specifically the work affected in order to drive sales.”
- “Provide benchmarks, provide rationale for goals, and illustrate how the work presented drove the results.”
- “**Isolate your results by eliminating other variables.** And don't cook the results. Don't include misleading stats/charts.”
- “Don't fudge the results. Your peers will know. **Honesty is more effective.** We have all had wins and we have all had fails. Every campaign does not need to be perfect.”
- “Make sure you provide **context**. If you show results, help the judges understand if the results are good and why. Explain what the numbers mean - don't just say 'engagement.' Define engagement.”
- “Be transparent and honest with data.”

“Tie together the story of how your work drove the results - the best cases did this seamlessly, the worst cases just threw the results out there as somehow a self-evident proof of the value of the work without explaining why or how.”



effie insight: Entries that provide an explanation of why the results are significant to the business of the brand tend to perform better in the Effie competition.

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JUDGE ADVICE: METRICS

- “Some of the cases used very soft measurements for results like CTR, or visits to sites. These measures are a start but should not be the ultimate goal. There needs to be concrete business results.”
- “In addition to marketing goals, I would love to see business metrics tied to those goals. In other words, how was a €10mm spend with a €4mm uplift in sales really a win? Yes perception changed, or awareness rose, but **how did it move the business?**”
- “Results need to be quantifiable and should be from real sources that can be verified.”

JUDGE ADVICE: LINKING OBJECTIVES & RESULTS

- “The strongest cases immediately and overtly **tied back to objectives.**”
- “Saying things like ‘exceeded by 520%’ just makes me think that the objectives were stupid rather than results being good.”
- “While they all cite results, sometimes the results are not adequately tied to the stated objectives, or the KPIs aren't appropriate for the goals.”
- “When the results presented felt vague or disconnected from the case objectives, I found myself assuming that this was due to an absence of truly convincing positive metrics to be shared.”

JUDGE ADVICE: OTHER MARKETPLACE FACTORS (QUESTION 4B)

- “Admit more and provide real-world context: give credit to things like economic trends in addition to your campaign. **You'll gain credibility by being honest about all the factors that created success.**”
- “I'm more likely to believe your campaign was effective if you acknowledge what other factors might have driven results and give me some reasons to believe they weren't responsible in this case.”
- “Be really explicit re: what "other factors" could have impacted performance. Be honest about what you can attribute and what you don't know.”

“Anticipate objections/questions and address them. Exhaustively eliminate variables. Prove your work led to your results.”

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How Judges Described Entries They Liked

“The best cases were simple, powerful, and were based on a powerful insight.”

“Clear, specific and measurable goals in the KPIs.”

“Strong connection to results.”

“A brilliant insight that inspires a unique and truly ENGAGING idea.”

“Each section builds to the next one and connects.”

“Don't be afraid to use visuals to highlight the data you are presenting versus typing it all out - it can be more impactful when seen in a chart.”

“Really dive into the metrics.”

“Paint an integrated picture of the communications solution.”

“Beautiful precision of insight, measurement, and outcomes. Clarity throughout. Humility and lack of over-claiming.”

“A great case tells a story. It draws you in and makes you want to read more.”

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BE CLEAR. BE CONCISE. BE HONEST.

- “The case itself should be presented as a stand-alone narrative. **If I didn't see the work, would I understand your full case, from challenge to results, on the case study alone?** There should be a flow from challenge to insight to idea. Be specific with your goals and targets. Competitive benchmarks provide context, and ROI is key. Without specificity, the metrics come off as vague, and suggest that goals have been retrofitted to the final result.”
- “I think it's important to make sure the overarching narrative is tight, yet provides **enough context to for judges to understand the results.** There's often debate/discussion over potential data that hasn't been included and its impact on the results.”
- “We are marketers and can see past marketing clichés and BS. Make sure cases are reviewed by management at your agency.”
- “**Build a clear, simple narrative.** Remember that the judges are industry experts so don't "jazz hands" your way through anything --- but also remember they're humans, so tell them an interesting story.”
- “Keep it simple. Demonstrate how medium and message integrate and work hand in hand to deliver against the stated challenge and objectives. Results **MUST** relate back to your stated KPIs.”
- “**Storytelling is important.** The person with the most heart for the campaign needs to be involved in the writing of the case study. Case studies that are too dry kill great results.”
- “Be a storyteller. **Entertain me with the submission.** I want to hear your voice.”
- “Consider the fact that the person reading it may be a creative mind, a media mind, or an analytical mind. Try to appeal to all by making it a very easy, enjoyable, and entertaining read. Don't focus too much on creative strategy and leave media strategy out. Really give a full picture of what all the different departments contributed.”



effie insight: You can't write your way to an Effie, but you can certainly write your way out of an Effie.

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CONTEXT IS KEY

- **“Do not underestimate the importance of benchmarks** - and providing reason for those benchmarks. For instance, a 4-week period out of a year is not helpful unless you explain why you used that 4-week period - it just looks like you are manipulating results.”
- “More context around the challenge; more specific, quantifiable results. Without these two components, it is incredibly difficult to judge the case's effectiveness.”
- **“Lots of what, not enough why.** Why do you want to increase awareness X%? What would that mean to your company/client in real-world terms? Context was missing on many of the results.”
- “Entrants need to provide benchmarks and more than just percentage growth. Without the context for those percentages, it's hard to tell what is truly great.”

MORE TIPS

- “Think about what judges are likely to be most skeptical about and address it.”
- “I was very disappointed that many people did not enter their work properly or take the time for more **customisation** in the entry form for the category entered.”
- “Be very clear about why you belong in a category - stretching a campaign to fit is very clear to the judges.”
- “The simpler, the better. Do not throw everything into the study. Be clear and focused on the one big idea.”

“Advertising principles should apply to case studies too: write them in a way that engages judges, focus on how your campaign helped achieve your brand's objectives and don't over-complicate it - less is more!”

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BEFORE SUBMITTING YOUR ENTRY...

- Ask a strong writer or editor to review your case for spelling, grammar, logic flow errors, mathematical miscalculations, etc.
- Have senior team members on both the client and agency side review the case to ensure the case is well-rounded with context and personality.
- Hold a **mock judging** session with other individuals/teams at your company. Find out how they would score your case and request feedback on length and jargon. Ask them what questions they have after reading the case, what the weakest areas are, what holes they can poke in the argument, and what parts of the case were confusing.

JUDGE ADVICE

- “Have someone outside the team read your case. **Too often category specific knowledge was assumed and broad context not given.**”
- “Start early. **Engage your client!** It's a team effort and they can provide valuable insight, direction, and support that the agency might not be asking for.”
- “To all agencies, please **have a senior person and a proofreader read your cases** before submitting them. Typos and logic flow errors create a bad impression.”
- “Write your entry not for a member of your team but for someone who knows absolutely nothing about your category, client, or client’s business problems. Take special care to answer all questions (and sub-bullets therein), as they were designed to be answered in that manner for a reason.”



effie insight: When writing your entry, carefully read and answer the detailed instructions under each question on the entry form template. Often judges complain they felt the entrant did not provide full information.

final tips

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DON'T FORGET...

- Review the **definition of the category** you are entering to ensure your case is truly eligible. If you are unsure, look at past winners in the category or reach out to Effie with your question. Some categories require specific information to be included in your entry and judges will deduct points if this information is not included.
- Do not assume judges are experts in your marketplace. Judges are specifically matched with categories where they will not have a conflict of interest. Hence, they may not know what equals strong success in your particular market.
- **Brevity** is essential. Judges are reviewing 15-18 cases in a full-day judging session, so the easier it is for them to understand your case, the better. Judges often say they wish less space was provided to entrants.
- Answer all questions. Carefully read the detailed instructions below each question.
- Review in detail the Reasons for Disqualification in the Entry Kit.
- Make sure **all data** throughout the entry includes a **specific, verifiable source**.
- Do not cite any agency names anywhere in the entry form or creative materials – **Effie is an agency-blind competition**.
- **Do not include results (including any sort of social media metrics), in your creative reel.**

“Make the context clear enough for someone who doesn’t sit at your office every day and may be reading their 10th case. Have more than one writer look at it, preferably someone from outside your group.”

Best of luck in this year’s competition.

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For any questions regarding the entry process, materials, categories, rules, judging, sponsorship opportunities, etc., please contact:

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